

202 could jeopardize highway funding

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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Construction and operation of the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway could jeopardize \$1.1 billion in federal highway funds destined for Arizona.

That's because the freeway is proposed to run upwind from an air quality monitoring station at West 43rd Avenue and Broadway Road. That monitoring station has historically shown higher-than-acceptable levels of small particulate matters, called PM 10, which the county is under an order to reduce or risk losing federal highway funds.

"Basically, it means you build a freeway and we lose our highway funds forever," said Steve Brittle, an environmental activist and co-founder of Don't Waste Arizona.

The 43rd Avenue monitoring site is also near where a proposed Interstate 10 bypass, called State Route 808, would connect with the Loop 202, adding even more vehicles to rush hour traffic in the area.

"It will be a colossal traffic planning screw-up," said Greta Rogers, who opposed the South Mountain Loop 202 in favor of a freeway further south and west to collect traffic from the high-growth areas in Pinal County and on the west side.

The South Mountain Loop 202 was first proposed in 1985 from Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills, west along what is now Pecos Road, through South Mountain Park and north to reconnect with I-10 at 55th Avenue.

In 2004, State Route 808 was added to the system as a reliever for I-10, running east and west, south of I-10 and connecting with the Loop 202 around Southern Avenue.

Some Loop 202 opponents say that the freeway connections will simply create two new "Broadway curves," where traffic entering I-10 and the Loop 202 will come to a crawl, creating gridlock.

Brittle said that the confluence of freeways, near sand and gravel operations in the Salt River bed, will also swamp the air quality monitoring station at 43rd Avenue.

"It's already a hot spot and this is the last thing they need to do," Brittle said.

But air quality issues raised by the freeway won't be discussed in depth until a draft environmental impact statement is released next year, perhaps as early as March. Once made public, the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team hopes to look at air issues in depth during a 45-day public comment period, before the final freeway plans are then sent to Washington, D.C. for approval.

Arizona Department of Transportation Director Victor Mendez has already given tentative approval to the 55th Avenue route for the freeway, which is expected to carry 165,000 vehicles a day.

In Ahwatukee Foothills, Pecos Road is the only viable route for the eastern portion of the project, unless the Gila River Indian Community decides to open up its land for freeway

construction.

That is not expected since the Tribal Council has twice approved resolutions opposing the freeway on Indian land and, thanks to a water settlement, the tribe now has the ability to cultivate much of the land south of Pecos Road.

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